

**PHARMACY EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM-A NEED OF TIME*****Mohamad Haniki Nik Mohamad¹, SitiHadijah Shamsudin¹ and ShaziaJamshed**

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ABSTRACT

Pharmacists are important among healthcare professionals because of their role in the identification and treatment of minor illnesses and counsel for major diseases irrespective of age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status and health convictions. Within the last five decades there is colossal entry of medications into the pharmaceutical market, thus accelerating the requirement of the pharmacists. The existing position of the pharmacist in a wider standpoint is that of a “seven star pharmacist” and thus pharmacy institutions are struggling to exercise principal influence in training students into full-fledged seven star pharmacists. Pharmacists being the health information custodian and the third largest group of health care providers seep into the changing dynamics of healthcare environment where now patient is both demanding and receptive for information even on minor illnesses

[1]. To be precise the profession of pharmacy embraces the concept of ‘Patient centered Care’ thus changing the image of a pharmacist from a ‘dispenser’ to a ‘decision maker’ and ‘caregiver’. However, more work is needed to be done to establish the true value of this underrated healthcare professional group in the eyes of other stakeholders; be it a doctor, nurse, or a patient. In the backdrop of this, there is an urgent need to continuously revisit the principles of pharmacy education for better competency skills. Therefore, the Council of Deans for the Malaysian Public Pharmacy Schools and Kulliyyah of Pharmacy, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) planned to organize a symposium, which was held in September 2013 at Conference Room, Cultural Activity Center (CAC), IIUM, Gombak Campus, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This was attended by 34 delegates from different public universities in Malaysia, including Deans, Deans’ representatives, and pharmacy academics. The key speakers were Deans of the Malaysian Public universities. The five a priori themes

on which the speakers embarked upon were Academic, Research, Community Services and Industrial Linkages, Student Activities and Internationalization.

Key Words: Research, Community Services and Industrial Linkages.

INTRODUCTION

ACADEMIC

The key areas which were discussed under the aegis of academics were assessment, professional competencies; teacher practitioner; didactic modality of lecturing and application of IT in teaching and learning. It is noted that professional competencies and assessment are entwined within themselves. It was well thought out that there is lack of standardization in the competency of students, which is most likely due to gaps in trainer and assessor competencies. A need for Logical Framework Matrix for assessment is also addressed and therefore a taskforce will be created to revise the outcome measures of professional competencies. The task force will bring forth standard assessment methods and tools to measure professional competencies of graduates and simultaneously 'Training of the Trainers' program on a regular basis will revamp their own competencies. The major stakeholders will not be other than lecturers and students. The implementation timeline could be not less than early next year. The issue of teacher practitioner, in terms of lack of opportunity for lecturers to practice, and even if time is spent in practice, cannot be counted under their Key Performance Indicators (KPI) is a cause of concern. A weightage in their KPIs will inspire them to devote towards practice despite their hectic teaching schedules at the universities. This will bring forth knowledge of contemporary issues and processes and facilitates learning in students through shared inquiry. This will also improvise Learning for Mastery outcome measures of pharmacy professional competencies. A need to construct a guideline for credit transfer among all public pharmacy universities which should be in the core course to be conducted in short semester is also highlighted. The implementation timeline will be within 1-2 years initially by encouraging Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the universities in the form of consortium for credit transfer. A couple of issues discussed in pockets were revamping of didactic lecturing mode and adaptation of Information Technology (IT) in various teaching and learning modalities. The induction of IT was emphasized within one year time frame. A couple of members in different groups advocated the implementation of Pharm D program and suggested visits to neighboring countries following Pharm D program. Interestingly, few of the participants raised the issue

of making the pharmacy institutes lucrative enough for the pharmacists to join as academics and for this a salary hike is suggested. Moreover, better incentives for postgraduates and induction of accommodation facilities at the campus for the faculty were also discussed. The implementation timeline cannot be less than 2 years within the university itself and Dean's Council as major stakeholders.

RESEARCH

In connection to research, it is suggested to be a major area which needs slight refurbishing. It is suggested that the identification of key research areas among different pharmacy schools, formation of research group among different disciplines of pharmacy and formation of society under the niche area are considered being prime steps in this regard. For this purpose, initially an identification of pro-tem committee members for the formation of pro-tem committee is the basic step. This, in turn, leads to taskforce formation, annual meetings and conferences and as well as writing collaborative research grants. In the light of paucity of postgraduate students for research, undergraduate research is advocated. In case of lab-based research, it is suggested that the Kuliyah and/or School should allocate some bench fees from the school fee. This could be mere RM 500/student. Likewise, the undergraduates can be motivated to contribute in conferences and for this undergraduate conferences will be organized on an yearly basis. This can expect to convince regulatory bodies and local investors to facilitate and translate research into a product or commercial entity. The ground work for the above-mentioned points highlights the need of mapping of expertise and equipment training among all the pharmacy schools.

COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRY LINKAGES

Coming to the point of community and industrial linkages, there is strong advocacy for inducting managerial skills in pharmacists and as well as to create awareness about entrepreneurship among them. A workshop to create an understanding about the concept of entrepreneurship leading to the setting of pharmacy outlet on an ownership basis is the need of time. It should be emphasized to the pharmacists in the workshop that within 5 years of their graduation, a pharmacist should start their own state-of-art pharmacy with separate counseling areas. The induction of this concept can be further strengthened by their attachments at pharmacy related business organizations. Although at present, this is practiced in a couple of public universities, still this type of attachment needs to be introduced in other public universities. This could be implemented within 1-2 years-time frame.

To ensure quality use of medicines the program by MOH on Home Medication Review (HMR) is a welcome step. The issue of lack of guidelines on the role of pharmacist was brought up in the current pharmacy education symposium. It is advocated to be implemented within one year. This was emphasized that each of the pharmacy school initiates a module for inter-professional learning between pharmacy and health science schools. It was accentuated that strategies should be chalked out for community outreach programs which monitor the students' activities.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

In terms of student activities, students' perspectives cannot be sidelined. It was discussed that students generally addressed this issue that their activities are not translated into credits. Likewise, from the faculty perspectives it was highlighted that student activities do not contribute to KPI. Generally same faces were observed to attend student activity and therefore active participation from both the sides are lacking. It was suggested that National Gathering of Pharmacy Students (NOGAPS) should be taken as basic model. It was suggested to be implemented within short span of time. In terms of students activities it was proposed to standardize one elective course as a Multi-Center National Level Program, supposedly in 2nd year, 2nd Semester and to be done concurrently at all the public universitiesM. An initiating step is the development of conjoint committee in this regard which likely bring this concept in line within 2 years- time.

INTERNATIONALIZATION

Student mobility and staff mobility were the key points for discussion under internationalization. In terms of undergraduate student mobility this can be encouraged by credit transfer to overseas university and from overseas university to public universities. A MOU between a consortium of schools of pharmacy and overseas universities by analyzing the curricula paves the way for this component of internationalization. For postgraduate students collaboration of supervisors between the two universities (overseas and public) was outlined. In order to practice in other countries, there is a need to set the minimal standard of qualification. It is suggested to start this by getting recognition from OIC countries. With regard to staff mobility, it was suggested to be taken as departmental issue pertaining to timing and quality of staff. The staff exchange for a mere time period of 3-6 months with 1-2 staff per department in a year was proposed. This can be done during sabbatical and may earn technical retooling for mid-career faculty.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell this two-day pharmacy education symposium highlighted and initiated revamping of assessment, professional competencies; teacher practitioner perspective; didactic modality of lecturing and as well as application of information technology in teaching and learning. Proposing the idea of extensive pharmacy research at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, it was also emphasized in the symposium not only to initiate new but enhance the pre-existent community and industry linkages. The student activities at the departmental level need to be improvised and prompted to excel to the level of induction in the KPI of faculty members. This will create a mutual interest in the student activities among the student and faculty members alike. Internationalization, in terms of staff mobility and student mobility under OIC countries was also proposed.

REFERENCES

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